

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF HANNAH G. SOLOMON  
FOUNDER OF NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

Born January 14, 1858, Hannah G. Solomon, already accomplished and well-known in secular women's groups and in the Jewish community, emerged as the obvious choice to chair the Jewish Women's Committee when Chicago hosted the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. While the men expected the women to simply serve tea and coffee, Solomon instead convened a large gathering of Jewish women to discuss the multiple possibilities and goals for a national Jewish women's organization. At the conclusion of the congress, delegates founded the National Council of Jewish women and unanimously elected Hannah Solomon president, changing forever the role of Jewish women and the nature of volunteerism.

At its founding, NCJW dedicated itself to religious, philanthropic and educational endeavors. Initially composed of 93 members, by 1896 NCJW had organized local sections in 50 cities and had attracted a membership of over 4,000 women. By 1925, the ranks had swelled to over 50,000 women. Its work was to fulfill its obligations to Judaism through education, fighting anti-Semitism, and social reform.

From Solomon's vision 122 years ago, NCJW has evolved into a national-wide organization of 70 local sections with over 60,000 members. In New Jersey nine sections with over 5,000 members currently work to improve the lives of women, children and families – continuing the work of Solomon and her "sisters." Issues such as gun violence prevention, human trafficking, women's health and reproductive justice, maintaining a fair and independent judiciary (Benchmark), domestic violence (Higher Ground), promoting and protecting voting rights, and immigration reform are direct legacies from the early days of NCJW.

NCJW Inc. created an annual award named for Solomon in which the national organization as well as local sections honor outstanding individuals who have changed the lives of others through his/her leadership efforts and service. In our Bergen County Section Loretta Weinberg, NJ State Senate Majority Leader and NCJW life member, received this prestigious award in 1995. In 2006 State Senator Richard Codey and Mary Jo Codey received this award, and in 2013 Bergen County Section honored Valerie Vainieri Huttie (also a life member) with the Hannah G. Solomon Award.

Our organization was founded on Hannah G. Solomon's ambitious desire to inspire social change. Her commitment and energy were legendary. Each day we strive to live up to her promise. NCJW is proud to support the designation of January 14 as "Hannah G. Solomon Day" to commemorate the lasting legacy of this remarkable woman.

*National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children and families and by safe-guarding individual rights and freedoms.*

Testimony presented on January 29, 2015, to NJ State Senate Committee by Bea Podorefsky, Chair of Advocacy, NCJW Bergen County Section